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Professor Riojas

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Introduction

My first semester in college has offered me quite a lot of room for personal and academic growth. Since the end of August, I've matured more quickly than I ever would've expected. I had just moved out, I was starting college, and I started my new job. In the span of a couple of months, I transformed from an apathetic teenager to a young adult with a new view on the world. Of course, part of that were things that I learned in academics, such as expanded points of view on historical events, how to intelligently examine my government and its dealings, and how the connection between being a better writer can improve my personal growth and experiences. This class, and especially our textbook *Naming What We Know*, has taught me the valuable lessons on how my writing and the processes in which I use can greatly affect me personally.

Communication Skills

A huge chunk of my academic experience in the Learning Community this semester was the Reacting Game and its integrated assignments. One of those assignments was the speech I had to compose in the role of my character with the goal of persuading others to fight for independence. Now, because I had to assume the role of a wealthy old white guy who lived 250 years ago, my speech would've sounded incredibly silly if I just randomly recited it over dinner when we were talking about small children's cognitive development (which, with a mother and adult child both

interested in education on top of a 3-year-old boy living in the house, this is not an uncommon subject). Dinnertime would have been an inappropriate time to read my speech because the conversation was about something wildly different, and the environment was much more relaxed and homey. My 9AM History 1301 class would be another story however, as my classmates and I knew to assume the roles of our characters as soon as we walked in and abandon those identities as we walked out. My peers would understand the context of my speech much more than if I told my mom, even if I randomly began blurting out my speech's content. This idea is what made my writing situational. According to Elizabeth Wardle in *Naming What We Know*, Concept 2.0, one of the main aspects of written communication (or communication in general) is the situation in which the writing is applied (Wardle, 2016). The situation in my classroom is different than the one at home. In one instance, I am a wealthy old white man talking about freedom and shit, and in the other I'm a poor, colored individual who's obsessed with ideas that didn't even exist when he was alive. The language, tone, and identity I use in those two situations are completely different, and because of that, my speech for History 1301 had to fit the environment I was placed in, and not the one at the dinner table.

Sorry Mom.

Teamwork

Thanks to this *wonderful* thing called First-Year Symposium, I had the *fabulous* chance to get to expand on my collaboration skills as both an individual and a writer (I say this sarcastically because I have social anxiety and working with someone added a constant stressor on top of everything else I had to do). I had been paired with my partner for the Reacting Game as our topic was to analyze our character and connect his beliefs and actions to a modern-day event. Because of how long of a stretch it was to connect these two ideas, my partner and I would have to bounce ideas off one another to get to where we needed to be. This action is something that *Naming What We Know* Concept 4.1 discusses as collaboration being a knowledge-making activity (Wardle, 2016). Doing things such as coming up with slide titles, what topics to write about, and general, overall collaboration was the process of Concept 4.1 and how I actively participated in it during my first semester in college.

Critical Thinking

Naming What We Know Concept 5.1 opens with the idea that “Writing is a full act of the mind, drawing on the full resources of your nervous system,” (Wardle, 2016, pg. 74) and some other philosophical “This would go SO hard as an introductory sentence!” bullshit. And honestly? Yeah. That sentence *did* go hard. The reason for my agreement is because it fully encompasses experiences I’ve had as both a personal and academic writer, especially throughout my first semester in college. I learned very quickly

that in order to really get in the *write* mood (hey, I'm practicing my mom-jokes for later, okay?) for whatever genre I'm going to be working on, there must be a specific environment to match. For example, I like to prepare for academic papers by sitting at my desk, turning on my big, cool colored light, and setting my phone to Do Not Disturb. However, when I'm writing my slow burn, player character x Nick Valentine romance fanfic, I create an entirely different environment. Big light? Absolutely not. Desk lamp with an orange piece of construction paper covering the bulb? Hell yeah. Heating pad and candle? Check. Snacks? You better believe it. The environments I create to match my type of writing matters heavily on the purpose of my text.

So, as I sit here in the CASA Teacher Prep lab with the huge, bright white lights and buzzing air conditioner, do I feel comfortable? For writing my English final, absolutely. The printer to my left and my terrible, scrawled out, handwritten outline to my right, and this comfortable but also uncomfortable chair I sit on *all* matter to my writing process. My little academic enclosure.

Personal Responsibility

So, here we are. The final stretch. As I've mentioned countless times before, I am a writer through and through. I love writing. However, there has been some trouble regarding how my personal writing has limited me on writing academically. Do you remember when a few lines up I mentioned that I'm writing a romantic fanfic? Yeah? Well. That's basically all I've been

writing for most of my writing career (with the exception of two novels, one of which I abandoned and the other I have been thinking about since 2017) and it's created some pretty major setbacks.

For instance, only writing romantic plotlines for like... hold on, I'm not good at math... I scored less than 200 points on my math SAT... 8 years (holy shit) makes writing outlines for academic papers such a pain in the butt. Every time I try to write a history paper, I want to create an outline that has a simple, chronological timeline with everything fitting in place. And while this isn't too bad of an idea, there's not many essay questions you can answer by just retelling an event. But my brain, who is SO used to just bam, bam, bam, idea, idea, idea, that I forget you have to explain yourself thoroughly in academic writing. This issue is actually a real problem addressed by real smart people, such as Elizabeth Wardle in *Naming What We Know's* Concept 5.3, one that discusses how habituation hinders writers as they try to branch out and explore other genres (Wardle, 2016). My sick, funky, "LOOK, THE HUMAN THINKS THE ROBOT IS HOT!!!" plotlines, unfortunately, will only get me so far. To become a better writer, I must allow my writing capabilities to expand and think outside of the little fanfic box I've been stuck inside for nearly a decade now. Maybe I can start by writing an academic paper on why humans find humanoid machines attractive.

Conclusion, Babey

I'm not going to lie, Professor Riojas, I just haphazardly threw my handwritten outline to the side because *man* am I done writing those for this semester. It felt so good. But you know what else felt really good? That satisfactory feeling I received when I read through *Naming What We Know* and every word I read felt like much needed food for my soul. Never have I ever felt like a book really, personally resonated with me. Of all the awful character deaths, and well timed I love yous, never has a book touched me this deeply. It felt like I was meeting with a therapist specifically employed to make me feel better about my writing. I've learned that it's okay to have a terrible first draft, and that it's actually beneficial to me in the long run. I've learned that all the constraints I felt in K-12 composition weren't just a figment of my imagination, but real, suffocating problems. Though most of all, I've learned what it means to be a writer. Corny, I know, but it's true. All the work I did as a 12-year-old, the gross, chaotic plots I had, or the made up/half researched facts I included in those dumb 5 paragraph essays were all incredibly important. Not only did they help me get to where I am now, but they also developed my writing skills, my worldview, and most importantly, my identity.

On a more personal note, I'd like to thank you for the experience you have given me as a first-year student. Words cannot express the gratitude I have for you reigniting my passion as a writer. From as early as I can remember, literacy has always been an important part of mine, my mother's, and my parted grandfather's lives. I have been reading since I was a

toddler, and writing since I was a tween. Losing my confidence in my writing killed a little part of me in my later teen years, but coming to college and taking your class has definitely changed that. I appreciate all the love and support you have offered to us, your students, and I hope you know what a difference it made for me. You are going on the dedication page of my first published novel for *sure*.

Again, thank you so much for everything.

Best wishes,

Quinn

References

Adler-Kassner, L., & Wardle, E. (2016). *Naming what we know: Threshold concepts of writing studies* (Classroom ed.). Utah State University Press.